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SERMON

PREACH'D

2.

At St. MARY's Church

IN
CAMBRIDGE,

January the 6th, Being the FEAST

OF THE

EPIPHANY.

LUKE II. Ver. 32.

A Light to lighten the Gentiles—

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LONDON:

Printed and Sold by H. Hills, in Black-fryars, near the
Water-side. For the Benefit of the Poor. 1709.

LUKE II. Ver. 32.

A Light to lighten the Gentiles——

THE *Hymn* from whence these Words are taken, is so well known, by being made a part of the constant Service of the Church, that I need not mention either the Author or Occasion of them : Every-body knows when they were spoken and by whom, sees who it is they point to, and is before-hand with me in the Application of them to the Day ; which the Church hath set apart to commemorate that great Mystery, the Manifestation of the *Messiah* to the Gentiles ; a Mystery hid from Ages and Generations, but now made known in the Persons of the Wise-men ; who by the Leading of a Star, came from the East to *Jerusalem* to pay their Homage to the New-born King : For they were the First-fruits of the Gentiles ; in Them was this Manifestation, not only signified and shadowed forth, but actually begun so soon did the *Messiah* the Glory of *Israel*, begin to be a Light to the Gentiles also.

This is a Day much to be remembred in it self ; and as 'tis the last of the Solemnity of this Season, so is it the great Reason we remembred those that went before it. For what if *Christ* were in the fulness of Time Born of a pure Virgin, what if he were Circumcised the Eight day, and made obedient to the Law ; what had these things been to us, or what Interest had we had in them, if He that was Born and Circumcised, had not been manifested to us ?

If we have any sense of the Misery the Gentile World had hitherto, and would have still continued to lie under, if the *Messiah* had not been reveal'd at all ; and the yet greater Evils they must have undergone, if he had been reveal'd in the manner the *Jews* expected ; we shall see abundant Reason to Celebrate this Day, and joyfully acknowledge the goodness of God to us, in that Manifestation of His Son, which we now Commemorate. And if a sense of being deliver'd

liver'd from our Misery, if a sense of having the greatest Evils remov'd far from us, be sufficient to excite Joy and Praise, and Thanksgiving in us; much more will our Rejoycing be increas'd; much greater will our Obligations be, when we consider the Favours and Blessings we do or may enjoy if it be not our own Fault, in the room of those Evils, which we must have been otherwise exposed to.

If the *Messiah* had not been reveal'd at all, the World would still have lain in Sin, in Blindness and great Darkness, and had neither known God, nor be known by Him; they would have been still wandering after their own Imaginations, and either not search'd, or search'd in vain for any real Happiness; their Wisdom must still have ended in extreme Folly, and they at last forc'd to sit down, after having tired themselves in endless Mazes and Uncertainties, in profound Darkness, and in the shadow of Death. Such would have been the wretched State of Man, had the *Messiah* never come, or which is all one, had never been reveal'd to us; for such it was before He came, as I shall shew more at large by and by, and such it still is in those parts of Gentile World, where the Light of the Gospel has never shone.

But worse, much worse had our Condition been, if the *Messiah* had been reveal'd in the manner the *Jews* expected; then indeed He had been a Light to the Gentiles, but not to lighten and comfort, and give Life to; far from that, He would have been a Light dreadful and terrible, to burn up and to destroy the Nations of the Earth, as many as would not bow their Neck to the *Jewish* Yoke; which was now in the fulness of Time to be laid on all People; and be, as they thought, universally submitted to: for they expected the *Messiah* should be a Mighty Deliverer, a Glorious Conquerour; One that should lift up his Voice on High, that should be dreadful to the Kings of the Earth, and subdue all People to Himself. They expected a *Star* should arise out of *Jacob*, and a *Sceptre* out of *Judab*, that should smite the *Corners* of *Moab*, and destroy all the *Children* of *Seth*.

These were the Expectations of the *Jews*; which had they been fulfilled, had the *Messiah* appeared, as they flattered

themselves He would; they indeed would have had great Reason to rejoyce: for to see the Slavery they were under, for in truth their subjection to the *Roman* yoke was little better, to see that not only changed into a glorious Liberty, but to have themselves the Power of the World in their own hands; to see all Nations and Kingdoms fall down before them; but above all, to have it now their turn to Rule over those, who at present Ruled it over them; this would have been matter of great joy to any People, tho' they had been more considerable, had suffered less, and had had a better Temper than the *Jews*. But how great soever their Joy would have been on this occasion, the rest of the World would have had little Reason to joyn with them: their portion would have been to Lament themselves and their hard Fortune; their Sorrow would have risen with the Calamities this state of things would have reduced them to, and both would have increased in proportion to the Prosperity and Joy of this little People; who confined to a narrow corner of the World, now made no Figure, were no terror to their Neighbours, but lived to themselves, despising and despised.

But, Thanks be to God, this is not the case; their Expectations are so far from being fulfilled, that the exact Reverse of them is come to pass. They are so far from being the only People whom the Lord hath redeemed, so far from engrossing the Blessings of the *Messiah* to themselves, that they are almost the only Nation that has had no part in them: For God hath given them the Spirit of slumber, Eyes that they should not see, and Ears that they should not hear: They stumbled, they fell, and thro' their fall Salvation is come unto the Gentiles. So great is the goodness and severity of God; on them which fell, severity; but goodness towards us. His severity indeed is by no means matter of Joy to a good Man; far be those Thoughts from us, we ought rather to pity their great Unhappiness, and pray for the Time when God will have mercy on his Ancient People; but we ought to make this Use of it, it should teach us to set a greater Value on his Goodness, who have received such undeserved and unexpected Favours from him, *When we were no People, when we sought Him*

Him not, nor asked after Him; and that not in common and together with them who were his People, and whose God he had declared Himself to be; but what is much more surprising, they had no share in them: *The casting them away was the reconciling of the world.*

That we may the better understand the Greatness of this Mercy, and have a due sense of the Obligations it brings with it, I shall consider,

First, The State of the Gentile World before our Saviour came;

Next, Wherein the Enlightning it consisted; and,

In the *last* place, make some Application of the Whole.

First, To consider the state of the Gentile World before our Saviour came, we find it frequently represented to us in the Scriptures under one Word, and that is Darkness; *To give Light to them that sit in Darkness; Ye were sometime Darkness, but now are ye Light in the Lord; who hath called you out of Darkness, into marvellous Light; We are not of the Night, nor of Darkness; who hath delivered us from the power of Darkness*: with many more places of the like nature, in all which the Word *Darkness* is used, to represent the sad Condition the World was in, before the *Messiah* was manifested to them: sad indeed it was, if this be a just Name for it: For Darkness we have all a great and natural Aversion to, 'tis a state of Inactivity, deprives us of all the use and pleasure of the Day, and is utterly unfit for Motion; we either cannot move, or cannot be sure we move aright; 'tis a time fit only for the Beasts and Men of prey to move in; for we want the Benefit of the Noblest and most Useful sense we have, our Sight; without which the Rest are of very little Use, either to keep us from the Dangers which we should otherwise bring upon our selves, or to defend us from the Insults and Injuries of others. In a word, There is nothing creates a greater, or more universal Fear, than long and unusual Darkness; and nothing but Custom, and the help of artificial Light reconciles us to what is usual. What then can a state of Darkness mean less than a wretched, ignorant, uncomfortable state; a state full of confusion and Error, of corrupt Opinions, and

abominable Practices; a state hideous and ugly as the First Chaos, when the Earth was *without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep.*

Now that the state of the Gentile World before our Saviour came, was a state of Darkness, and deservedly called by so black a name, must be owned by all who have ever look't into these Times, and considered the Particulars wherein this Darkness consisted; which, were they all put together, would give us a just Conception of that universal Night, which was then spread over the Intellectual World. The great Ignorance they were under, and the Consequences of it, would give us such a frightful Scene of things, as one can hardly tell how to believe; or believing, how to reconcile it with the Wisdom and Goodness of that Being, whose Eyes are always upon the Works of his Hands, and who *from the Beginning Ruleth over All.* The first and great Fundamental Error they were in, was concerning the *True God*; their Notions were so contrary and inconsistent upon this Head, that one can't read them without deeply and frequently reflecting, how poor and low a Thing the Mind of Man is, when he attempts to comprehend Divine Truths. The World was divided into two Extrems; they were either for many Gods, or none at all; Opinions almost as remote from Truth, as from one another. The Oldest indeed, and always most Universal Opinion, and which perhaps arose from the scattered and corrupt Remains of some Ancient and genuine Traditions, was that of many Gods: But this was so absurd in it self, and all its Consequences; their Number, Names, Actions, Offices, Worship and Sacrifices, were so very unaccountable, so impossible to be made Sense of; that when the World grew more refined, the Men of Penetration and thought, to mend the matter betook themselves to the opposite Extrem: and because they could no where meet with a rational Religion, vainly concluded that Reason and Religion were in their Natures inconsistent; they concluded no Religion could be true, because all they had seen were certainly false. For they were in almost every Country different at the same time, and in the same Country at different times: they worshipped

shipped they knew not what nor why, they worshipped Stocks
 and Stones, and under them imaginary Beings infinitely a-
 bove Humane Nature, together with others as much below it.
 We have an Epitome of the grossest and foulest Superstition
 the World ever knew, in that one People the *Egyptians*: No-
 thing can be more ridiculous, than what the best Writers tell
 us of their Gods, and their Religious Rites; and in their Sto-
 ry we see in effect the Religions of other Nations. For *Egypt*
 was the great Nursery of Superstition; from thence arose that
 thick Darkness, which afterwards over spread the Earth; not
 that this Darkness was every where uniformly spread as soon
 as it began to be diffus'd, 'twas divided and broke into une-
 qual parts, insensibly altered as it went along, and received
 different Additions, according to the several Climates to which
 it came. By which means their Religions by degrees differed
 more from one another, but not less from Reason than before.
 Sacred and Prophane were every where arbitrary things and
 sometimes names directly opposite were given to the same
 thing by different Orders of Men in the same Country. There
 was nothing so absurd which Superstition could not lead them
 into a belief of; and if one may judge of what they thought
 by what they did, one would think, the more absurd a thing
 was, the more they liked it, otherwise one can't imagine how
 the World could have fall'n into so great a variety of Errors,
 so very gross, with so small a mixture of Truth in them;
 which it was very little, so very probably 'twas owing not to
 any right Reasoning: for had they reasoned about these things
 rightly, they must needs have found out more Truth, they
 could not have stopped so very short, and have taken up with
 so few right Notions, so extremely disguised with false ones.
 These therefore 'tis likely were borrowed from some Tradi-
 tions, which once were more perfect, but now were grown
 very old, and by length of Time, and frequent Transplant-
 ing so altered and defaced, that the first Authors of them
 would scarce have known them; so little of the genuine
 parts remained, and the old Strokes were in a manner all
 gone. Else how could things so incoherent be embraced,
 as there was in most of their Religions: how was it possible

so many and so differing Persuasions could be deductions from the same common Principles?

'Tis hard to conceive how the Opinions of any one People, taken together, could proceed from any Principles at all; nor indeed did they: these Religions were then form'd when the World were Children in Understanding; when they admired every thing, and understood nothing; nothing of Arts and Sciences, nothing of the Causes and Natures of things; in a word nothing beyond their Senses, and what was just before their Eyes; and by that means became an easy Prey to a few, who thought farther then the rest, and used them as we use Children now; amused them with Fables and strange Stories, and lead them which way they would, by complying with their Superstition; to which purpose they took care the Doctrines they taught the People, should be absurd enough, and well adjusted to the Lowness of their understandings. This was really the Case, and no better; for the Fabulous Age of the World was the time when these several Religions were first invented, and their *Poets* were the Authors of them; of which the Eldest either never wrote, or at least nothing of their genuine Writings is now left: but of the *Poets* which do remain, we find always the oldest, has had in greatest Veneration, so be sure most absurd in matters of Religion.

The World in the mean ime was like to thrive and grow in Understanding, under the Influence of such Teachers, and in embracing Schemes of Religion formed in such Times, Times of which we know nothing certainly besides their Ignorance. Yet Considerations of State, Management of designing Men and the Interest that a great many had in them, kept these Superstitions up in after-times; the bulk of the People being as ignorant as ever, and still believing whatever they were taught. There were, no doubt, some wise and honest Men who saw the Absurdity of these things, and would have declaimed sooner and more loudly against them, but were deterred, 'tis likely, from the Attempt, partly by the Danger they might bring upon themselves, and partly thro' a very right Opinion they had, that Religion was necessary for Society; and that tho' the establish'd one were very fault-

ty, there might be more inconvenience in labouring a Change; especially since they could not be sure what Religion was true, to bring in the room of it, or indeed whether any were so: besides it may be thought, that in that state of things Prejudices were necessary to make the People have any Notion of Religion; and therefore if they were once removed, the People, who are always ready to run into Extrems, and if once unhinged, are very hard to be settled again, if they had shaken off, the Religion they were bred in, would then perhaps take up with none at all. Some such Thoughts probably kept in the Wise Heathens from exposing the Folly and inconsistency of the Religions then in use; who could easily have framed more rational Schemes, but were not sure they could find out the True one; and therefore were content to sit down by those they had, and make the best Sense of them they could.

In time indeed they ventured, many of them, to refine a little, and by degrees endeavoured to explain away what was most apparently absurd; but this did not satisfy some, who being Men of more Heat and less Discretion, were for going faster, and thinking they knew more than all before them, could not keep in the mighty Secret any longer. The Credulity, impieite Belief and Bigotry the World had been so long under, about things they had scarce any notion at all of, made them run now into the other Extream; and so first *Scepticism* and then downright *Atheism* became the Learning and Wisdom of the World. These Men having found the World was mistaken in many things, began now to doubt of every thing, they began to question the Being of any God at all; and having shewn with Reason enough on their side the folly and weakness of the common Opinions, as they were then corrupted, 'twas so hard to see the little Truth that lay under them, that without Distinction they threw them all away; and setting up for themselves, entertained about almost althings new Opinions of their own, very different from what had been hitherto received, but not less Extravagant. And thus by different ways they came to all intents and Purposes to the same end, and left the World in as ill a Condition as they found it, or rather made things worse; for perhaps 'tis better

better to act upon wrong Principles, than none at all; for then Men may be govern'd by those that are wiser than themselves, whereas the Men of no Principles can be govern'd neither by themselves nor others.

Some of the main Points about which the World, when they began to think freely, were employ'd, were these: First, They were much in the dark, whether there were such a thing as an Eternal intelligent Being or not; if there were, wherein his Nature consisted, and what were his chief attributes; and if there were one such Being, who was infinitely wise and good, whether there were not an Evil one, equal in power to him; without which they could not account for the Origine of Evil, which was always one great Difficulty. Next, if there were One Eternal Mind, and but one, which we call God, whether he made the World or not; if he did, whether he only put things into that Frame and Order they are now in, or whether he made the things themselves out of nothing: If the former, for the latter was an Opinion that all their *Philosophy* was not able to comprehend; whether this God were any other than the Soul of the World, animating the vast Mass of Matter, after the same manner as the Soul of Man actuates his little World. Again, if God were a being intirely distinct from the Universe, with which many of them confounded him, whether he did at all interest himself in the Government of the World, after he had made it; that is, whether there were any *Providence* or not, whether his Happiness did not consist in perpetual Ease and Rest, and consequently whether any Care or Thought of Business were not inconsistent with it; or if he did meddle and concern himself with the Government of Things, whether this Care were not confin'd within certain bounds in looking after the great Springs and Wheels of the Machine, while the Sublunary things and this lower World were quite neglected; or if he took Care of them too, whether this extended to the insensible and Vegetable part only, or to the Sensible and Rational; if to them, whether he governed the Minds and Actions of Men, or only their Involuntary Motions; if their Minds and Thoughts and Actions whether by a chain of Causes link'd together in a perpetual

and necessary Order, or only by a Concurrence with their own free voluntary Motions; if the latter, whether Men were by that rendred capable of Moral Good and Moral Evil; if capable, whether they were actually accountable to God for what they do: which supposes that they are fixt an unalterable Rules of Good and Evil, that these Rules are the Will of God, that he has declared this will of his to Man; if so, what and how many are these Rules; when and were Revealed; are they of Perpetual and universal Obligation or not; if some only, which are they; what Punishments are annex to the Violation of them; when to be inflicted, in this Life or another; if in another, the Soul must be immortal and immaterial, and the Man must live again; besides many other difficulties, which must be determined, before we can know whether Men be actually accountable to God for what he does.

These, all these are questions of great Importance, and such as the wisest Heathens could come to no certain Conclusions about: Some of them indeed by an extraordinary goodness of mind have hit upon Noble Thoughts, and very much resembling Truth; but when well examined, they appear to be, what themselves could rather wish to be true, than be at all sure they were so. I shall give but one Instance of this, and that is in that excellent Discourse of *Socrates* before his Death: in which there are strange and surprizing strokes of Truth, about the Immortality of the Soul, and the Rewards and Punishments of another Life. Who can without pity see the weak Efforts of the best Reason? who can forbear wishing him Success, or not be sorry, extreamly sorry at his Disappointment, who has such Noble Conclusions in view; but is utterly at a loss, by what certain steps to get at them? One sees him thro' all along that piece, very earnest in the search after and pursuit of Truth; he sometimes takes such true Steps, and pursues so closely, that one can't help thinking every minute, the next will be the last, he seems so very near it; and then loses his Scent a while, and then comes on again; which gives the Reader a very melancholy pleasure, who can't but be in some sort disappointed himself, every time he sees He is. The Discourse throughout must be own'd to be at

first sight very Beautiful ; but if one view the Picture nicely, examine the several parts of it, the Proportions and Reason on which they are built, the whole will appear such a strange mixture of Truth and Error, full of such inconclusive Arguments, so like dreaming of some *Fairy-land*, that one can't but wonder how it could come from the hand of so great a Master, or be thought a finish'd Piece by those that heard it. In truth, under all the Good, will he discovers for so good a Cause, one can't but observe with how much Diffidence himself speaks of it, much less can any body else be convinc'd by what he says, unless such as come prepar'd to believe before they hear, and can take up with Conclusions first, and then look out for Premises, by which they may seem to others to have to come to them.

So great was the Blindness and Ignorance the World was under about things of the greatest moment ; I might proceed to shew that their Works also were works of Darkness ; that their Manners (generally speaking) were as corrupt as their Opinions ; but the close Connexion there is between religion and Morality makes this less necessary, nor have I time for it, if I would. How far this Corruption was inevitable and invincible, I will not now dispute. Thus much is certain, the World either had no means to remove it, or at least did not know how to use them, and consequently would never have remov'd it, had not the *Messiah* in the fulness of time been reveal'd to them. In Him *the People that walked in Darkness, have seen a great Light : they that dwell in the Land of the shadow of Death, upon them hath the Light shined.* 'Twas He dispell'd these Clouds which had so long hugg'd over the Earth ; He enlightn'd the World after this long and universal Dark, this black eternal Night.

Wherein this Enlightning the World consisted, was the Second thing I propos'd to speak to ; which I shall do very briefly. It consisted then in introducing a new state of things, a State in all its parts opposite to that I have been describing ; in teaching the World all that is necessary from them to know of Divine things of the Nature of God, and of themselves ; in giving us just and true Notions of the Divine Providence, of his *Wisdom* and *goodness* in governing the World ; in laying down excellent Rules of Living well, and teaching us the true nature of *Moral good* and *Evil* ; and lastly, in giving us a reasonable *Worship*, worthy of Man, and in some sort worthy his Creator.

Now

Now the World is no longer at a loss to know what God is; what he requires of us, and how he will be served: now we have a certain Measure of our Duty, we have fixt unalterable Rules to go by; we depend now no longer on our own *Reason*, or the *Authority* of others; we are directed by the highest *Reason* of the best being, by the Divine and Infalible Guidance of the Son of God. Before, the World must either have follow'd the *Diffates* of some great *Law-giver*, or found out the Rules of their Duty for themselves. As to the former, no Man ever had or could have an *Authority* to prescribe to the rest of the World, nor was it safe he should; as appears from the great Imperfections that are to be met with in the best *Systemes* of *Humane Laws*: nor could they find out the Measure of their Duty themselves, for that requires vast *Abilities*, capable of drawing a very long Chain of *Consequences* from a very few *Principles*; and therefore if possible, yet is it what much the greatest part of Mankind have neither *Capacity*, nor *Opportunity* for. But this is but a part only of what our *Saviour* hath done for us: to all this he has added great and precious Promises to invite us to our Duty, and proportionable *Threats* to deter us from the contrary; and that nothing might be wanting to compleat this great *Redemption* he hath wrought for us, that no one might complain he had not all due *Assistance* to enable him to do what is required of him, he hath graciously promised his *Holy Spirit* to all them that call upon him.

Oh! how thankful ought we all to be for this great *Goodness* of God to us, how careful not to undervalue it as some do, who by a strange Ingratitude, because God hath suffered them to enjoy the *Light*, conclude there was no *Darkness* and that the World would have been sufficiently enlightened, tho' God had done nothing of all this for them. They deny the necessity of *Revelation*, and bring down the *Sublime Perfection* of the *Christian Religion* to that which they call *Natural*: They can now prove to you from that all the Truths deliver'd in the *Gospel*, and argue against *Revealed Religion*, from that very *Light* it furnishes them with; And so in truth beg the *Question*, while to prove they don't stand in need of *Revelation*, they produce as the *Effect* of their own unassisted *Reason* what was really borrow'd from it. They distinguish not between *Reason* with, and without the helps the *Scriptures* give it; which yet are very different things, as different as it is to find out a thing, and assent to it when it is found out: a Man may as well say, he can move as regularly in the *Dark* as in the *Light*, because he hath in both the Faculty of *Moving*; as pretend he could reason as well without the *Gospel*, as he can under it, because he would have the Faculty of *Reasoning* then as well as now. Could these Men possibly efface the early *Notices* they receiv'd from *Revelation*, they would soon think more meanly of themselves, and see how small *Advances* we should make, if God in his *Displeasure* had still left us to our selves; or, if either their great *Opinion* of themselves, or the real difficulty of the thing hinder them from judging of the strength, or rather weakness of their own *Reason*, in case it were divested of the helps they have from *Revelation*, a little *Learning* will serve the turn: let them look back into the first *Histories* of the earliest Times, let them read the best *Discourses* of the ablest Men, Men no way inferior to them

them in *Natural Abilities*, Men of greater *Industry*, closer *Thought* and more *Virtue*; and then they will be easily convinc'd, unless they are resolv'd not to see, how few *Conclusions* we are able to come to of our selves about *Divine Matters*, about *God*, *Religion*, *Liberty*, *Morality*, a future *Judgment* and *Immortality*.

There is great reason to think these Men contend for *Natural Religion*, not for its own sake, but to pull down that which is revealed; and were that once done, they would deal easily enough with this, and so get to their beloved Conclusion, *That there is no Religion at all*. They would then be very ingenious in showing the faults and imperfections of what they now so much cry up, and would with Triumph prove, *That they who have thrown off Revealed Religion, cannot reasonably adhere to it*; since the Difficulties against one, many of them at least, lie equally against the other, if one be absurd and too hard to be believed, so is the other, and no one, who can make up with the *Principles of Natural Religion*, can find it difficult to embrace the *Christian*. But we have not so learned *Christ*, we see and know the great Things he hath done for us, that he is the true *Light*, and that the World was in *Darkness* before he came. He is the great Restorer and Deliverer of Mankind from that *Blindness* and *Ignorance* the Degeneracy of their Nature had brought them under; 'twas He that formed anew, as it were, this part of the Creation, and gave again to Man an understanding Heart; He stamp'd again upon him the Image of his Maker, that Image, on which the Dominion of Man over the rest of the Creation was at first founded, which Prebeminence before 'twas hard to see a reason for, he differ'd so very little from the Beasts that perish, but now hath God exalted him for ever, he has once more made him a little lower than the *Angels*, he hath crown'd him with Honour and Immortality, which is again brought to light by the Gospel of his Son. *This is the Lord's doing, and is marvellous in our Eyes*; for this should every Mouth be full of Thanksgiving, and every Tongue tell forth his Praise, 'Tis as impossible to have a sense of these Favours, and not be thankful for them, as 'tis for those to be thankful, who have no sense of them. But this is not all, 'tis not enough to thank God on this wise: The *Natural Consequences* of what he has done for us, is to deny *Ungodliness* and worldly *Lusts* to have no fellowship with the unfruitful *Works of Darkness*, but to walk as *Children of the Light* and of the Day, The times of *Darkness* were times of *Ignorance*, and therefore God wink'd at them; but now since the *Light of the Gospel* is shed abroad, he commands all Men every where to repent. Our Duty rises in proportion to the means God has furnish'd us with for the performance of it; this everybody is sensible of, this makes wicked Men so naturally plead *Ignorance*, this makes Men shut their Eyes so hard against the *Light of the Gospel*, as being conscious they are without excuse, if the *Light* really shines upon them, and they see it does so, and yet still work the *Works of Darkness*. Now if this be so, if our Duty increases as the *Light* does that is given us to work by, then are they under the greatest Obligations, who enjoy most of this *Light*: And therefore as the *Jewish Dispensation* oblig'd to a greater *Perfection* and *Holiness* than what the *Heathen World* knew, so does *Chri-*
stianity

Christianity obliges us to a greater than either. We are taught that *Except our Righteousness exceed the Righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, we shall in no case enter into the Kingdom of Heaven.*

By the same Argument a greater degree of *Piety, Charity*, and other *Vertues* will be required of some parts of the *Christian World* above others in as much as they enjoy greater *Light*, purer and less corrupted by *Superstition, Ignorance* and the remains of ancient *Heathenism*. This is the case of the *Reformed Churches*, in comparison not only of the *Roman*, but of any other *Christian Church* now in being: And if all the *Reformed Churches* enjoy not an equal *Light*, we have no reason to think any of them on this account more happy than our own. And indeed we are apt enough to own this, and please our selves with the thoughts of being of so pure a *Church*, where we have the *Word of God* constantly read and preached to us frequent *Sacraments*, and daily *Prayers*: we are bred up to a *Rational* and intelligible *Devotion*, we want neither the *Substance* nor *Form* of *Godliness*, we are taught to serve *God* with the purest *Worship*, and in the most decent manner. But 'tis strange to see Men cry up this *Church*, and value themselves for being Members of it, and yet not see at the same time how much more they have on this account to answer for: how by this means the great Plea of not knowing or not being taught their Duty is wholly taken from them.

But I must not stop here; the gradation from *Heathenism* to *Judaism*, and from thence to *Christianity* in general, then to the *Reformed* parts of it, and last of all to our own *Church*, this Gradation must still be carried one step higher, from our *Church* to the *Eyes* of the *Universities*. Here we meet with greater, much greater means of knowing and doing our Duty than any other place any where affords. And who does not see the Consequence of this? were a Man who had never seen or heard of such a place as this before, for the first time made acquainted with the Institution and Design of it, the *Laws* we are govern'd by, the *Care* and *Discipline* and *Method* of Instruction; and lastly the great and good Examples we live under; how would he long after the Original of so fair a Picture, how desirous would he be to see this Beauty of our Earth? He would expect Learning to run down among us like a Stream, and Righteousness like a Flood; he would expect to meet every where with bright and shining Instances of *Piety* and *Holliness*, of *Industry* and *Temperance*, of *Charity*, *Patience* and *Humility*; in short, something far beyond the Improvements the rest of the World are capable of. But I need not suppose what Thoughts a Man would have, who never saw any thing of a University beyond the Scheme & Model of it; we are pretty well convinc'd, that this is what the world expects of us: for if they did not look for something very perfect, they would think our Imperfections a great deal less, than we find they are apt to do. Which should be an additional Argument to us to walk worthy of the *Light* we have; for our *Light* is not like the *Pillar* that led the *Israelites* of old, a *Light* to them it was to guide, and Dark to all besides; as we have this *Light*, so every-body sees we have it, and from thence are ready to take all advantages against us. I think we may without great *Partiality* to Our-selves say, VVe are not fairly dealt with in this matter; *Envy* and *Ill-nature* and a Spirit of *Phanaticism*, both as to the *Civil* and *Religious State*, have certainly a

great share in the loud Complaints against us; and they that rail at us for being no better, are many of them really sorry, we are no worse, Men who design to destroy all Principles of Religion and Government, can't with patience see those Places flourish, which are so directly opposite to such Designs, whose very End is to inill true Notions of the things, and root out all destructive Opinions whatsoever. Which makes *Arbists* and *Dissonances* necessarily Enemies to our very Constitution; for these are the Banks that keep out their pernicious Doctrines from breaking in upon the Nation. Not that these are all the Enemies we have; a little Truth mixed with a great deal of Calumny, has made our Faults appear much greater than they are; by which means other and better Men have been unhappily influenced to the Prejudice of these Places,

But how unjust soever these Complaints are, we may make a right use of them, by mending whatever is amiss, by walking more circumspectly, and giving no occasion to the Adversary. 'Tis the Fate of persons and Places that are Eminent; the more they are so, the more they are exposed to publick View, and consequently Censure; for many, a great many take a view of them, not to admire their Beauty or Excellency, but to find some fault with them, and then are most disappointed when they find fewest. And as this is generally one of the Disadvantages of a high Station, so it is in a peculiar manner, and for particular reasons, the Portent or rather Fate of those illustrious Bodies the Universities. But to return from this Digression, which a just sense of the *Light* we live under, the Obligations it lays on us, and the Restlessness of our Enemies has led me to; where much is given, much is required, and in return of great Favours, great Duties become due from us; and if we would be the better for the *Light* that is come into the *V*World, we must endeavour to deserve it; we can have no benefit in the bright shining of the Gospel, unless we renounce the hidden Pleasures of the *Night*. God did not give us this *Light* to glory in our Shame, and shew that we can be wicked still, that we can abuse his Grace, and dare produce those Monsters into open Day, which before were shrowded under the cover of the Dark. No, what was then excusable, is now no longer so; to prefer the absurd pleasures of Sin, before the Beauty and Comeliness of Virtue, when our Eyes are open, and in the Day, this is very unnatural and unpardonable, this proves we want Common sense as well as Common gratitude, this can't but be highly provoking to Almighty God, who bestow'd these Favours on us to quite other purposes. Let us not therefore any longer distinguish our time as *Christians* into *Light* and *Darkness*, and think we have the *Night* still left to revel in: the *Darkness* now will not cover us, the *Darkness* is no *Darkness* to us; the *Light* is as clear as the *Darkness* to us, and *Light* and *Darkness* are both alike, For since the Sun of Righteousness is risen, since He that was in the beginning *Light*, *Eternal Light*, is come down among us, and become the *Light* of Men; to this new State agrees the Description St. John gives us of the New Jerusalem, with which I shall conclude. *The city had no need of the Sun, neither of the Moon to shine in it, for the Glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the Light thereof.*

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